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The Wonderful Old World

37 2 3

Chapter 1 by Faye Lynch

The little girl peered around the frame of my bedroom door. She snuck in quietly with a shiver. I approved her, wordlessly with my eyes. She scrambled into my bed, frightened of what was going on outside. "Mama" she said in her quietest voice, "tell me of the wonderful old world. I want to know everything! Please mama." I hushed her a little and pointed to my pen and notepad on the side table. She quickly handed it to me, eager to know something.

I thought a moment before I wrote at the top of the page THINGS THAT USED TO BE SAFE. I continued with ease.

-Leaving the house in daylight.
-Eating bread from the bakery
-Telephones/cell phones
-Laughter
-Your father

I could have listed a hundred things but I didn't want to spoil everything.

She looked to me, after she'd read, with total shock. I ripped the page out and gave it to her. I soon realized I may have to explain a telephone but she never asked. She just stared at my writing. She snatched the pen and paper from me and set if back onto the table.

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when I had a voice, if it weren't for the old fashioned tv from 2030 or 2031, she would know no words. It sickened me to think about it.

She scurried off my bed and out of the room. I wondered what she was about to do or play, but I was too worn out to find out.

Chapter 3 by Hayley

The pounding on the door awakens me. I must have dozed off. I worry that the squad will find my list if they decide to do an inspection today, but I have no time to hide it. In my condition, it takes me too long to get to the door. They almost break it down everyday when they come for Morning Maintenance, and if I try to hide the list, they would surely barge in and catch me in the act.

I stagger to the door, my hand on the knob as they give their final warning knock. The squad pushes their way inside. I relax about the list when I see there are only three men today, dressed in their usual armor and face shields. They always bring five men to conduct a inspection, three for Morning Maintenance. My daughter peeks out of her bedroom, and they motion for her to join us. She doesn't like being in the living room. Since we are no longer allowed window coverings, it's hard to avoid seeing the street carnage in the main room.

The squad captain pulls up the morning survey on his watch and projects the questionnaire in front of me. One man goes to check our bedrooms for fugitives while the other takes my daughter's wrist to scan her barcode.

-Have you or your household had any visitors since Night Maintenance?
-No

-Have you or your household purchased any literature, weapons, medication, or food since Night Maintenance? If yes, please include your government permit number or temporary approval code.
-No

-Did you or any member of your household [illegible]
-No

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-Have you or any member of your household been contacted by or had any communication with The Resistance?
-No

-Have you or your household used any verbal communication since Night Maintenance?
-No

I always worry that they know that I'm lying, that they have a new device to test us for honesty. But the captain seems satisfied as he closes out the survey and scans my wrist. I can no longer see the other men from the living room, but I know exactly what they are doing. The one man will check the toilet meter to ensure it hadn't been tampered with, or to see if we have flushed anything that was not human waste. The other will collect our garbage and examine it thoroughly before taking it for disposal. They will meet in the kitchen and leave us our daily allowance for drinking water and nutrition chips.

The captain gives my daughter the pill first. She gulps hard, just as I have taught her to do. Then he administers mine, and I swallow it, flinching at the burning in my throat. He motions for the rest of the squad, and they leave.

I go to the kitchen, my daughter following behind me. I rub my stomach to ask her if she is hungry. She nods. I open the bag of nutrition chips and hand them to her. She pulls her pill out from under her tongue and hands it to me.

I swallow the pill. The government stopped checking mouths after daily pill intake last year, during the outbreak of canine flu. Even with protective gloves on, the flu was so contagious that many members of the squad were catching the illness from the mouth examinations. They decided instead to implement screenings of our waste, and as soon as I saw the opportunity, I taught my daughter to successfully hide her pill so that she would not remain emotionless. I just

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her life, she never cried, never smiled. Then, one afternoon, at the age of five, she stubbed her toe in the kitchen began wailing. But as I held her for comfort, she smiled, and I knew at that moment I had made the right choice.

It wasn't long before she started speaking. I'd heard speaking on the TV for many years, but the sound of a real human voice startled me. I tried to respond by telling her to keep her voice down, for fear of them hearing her, but I was surprised to find that I couldn't make a sound. Maybe it was from not talking for so long, but I suspect it was from the double dose of the pill. Every time I swallow it, I can feel the acid bubbling in my throat, and I think my vocal chords have burned away.

Through a complicated process, I thought her to read instead. It took weeks of using sounds from the TV and writing in an old, blank notebook I had hidden in my bedroom. Fortunately, she was a quick learner, and now it's how we communicate. As long as the squad doesn't find that notebook, I have hope for our future.

She glumly pecks at her nutrition chips for a moment. Then, her eyes light up as she whispers, "Mama, do you think we could sneak out again to find some real food? Maybe some fruit?"

I want to say yes, but it's so dangerous, and I am feeling weaker by the minute. In the past few weeks, the double dose of the pill has started to sicken me. There is a constant stabbing pain in my spine that makes it hard to walk, and I am always tired. I am worried that before long, the double pills will be the death of me. With that thought, I motion for her to bring me my notebook.

"Yes, we will sneak out", I write. "I don't make any promises about the fruit, but there are some things I need to show you in case I'm not here anymore."

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